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ABSTRACT

The effects of verbal and non-verbal parental behavior on the self esteem of the child were explored by means of a stratified random sampling of schools in a large metropolitan area in Northeastern United States. A Parental Response Inventory was first developed. This is a structured inventory consisting of 12 prepared situations and a choice of four alternatives for each situation. Six of the situations involve behavior of a positive nature, six of a negative nature. This and other measures to assess verbal response patterns of mothers and the self esteem of children yielded the following results. A significant relationship exists between maternal descriptiveness in negative situations and the self-esteem of the child. Significant differences are observed between the inner city black sample and suburban white sample. Measures to assess non-verbal parental behavior and its effects on the self esteem of the child indicate a significant relationship between maternal empathy, genuineness, and positive regard toward the child and his level of self esteem. Thus, another aspect of socio-cultural significance related to child-rearing has been identified and measured. [Because of the print quality of the original, this document will not be clearly legible when reproduced.] (Author/JM)

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COMMUNICATIVE DIMENSIONS OF MOTHER-CHILD INTERACTION AS THEY AFFECT THE SELF ESTEEM OF THE CHILD

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Abstract

The effects of verbal and non-verbal parental behavior on the self esteem of the child was explored by means of a stratified random sampling of schools in a large metropolitan area in Northeastern United States. Measures to assess verbal response patterns of mothers and the self esteem of the child yielded the following results. A significant relationship exists between maternal descriptiveness in negative situations and the self esteem of the child. Significant differences are observed between the inner city black sample and suburban white sample. Measures to assess non-verbal parental behavior and its effects on the self esteem of the child indicate a significant relationship between maternal empathy, genuineness, and positive regard toward the child and his level of self esteem. Discussion focused on theoretical support, cultural differences, application and import for future inquiry.

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COMMUNICATIVE DIMENSIONS OF MOTHER-CHILD INTERACTION AS THEY AFFECT THE SELF ESTEEM OF THE CHILD

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The purpose of this investigation was to study the effects of verbal and non-verbal parental behavior on the self esteem of the child. As a measure of verbal behavior, the verbal response patterns of the mother was investigated. A dichotomy suggested by Ginott (1965) which involved categorizing verbal responses as being either descriptive or evaluative was utilized. As a measure of non-verbal behavior, the mother's empathy, genuineness, and positive regard toward the child provided an estimate of her relationship with the child.

The approach advocated by Ginott derives largely from a Rogerian theoretical basis. According to Rogers (1951), growth forces are a part of every individual. When the individual is free to grow, the process of self-actualization occurs. As this individual self develops and matures within its own perceptual field, a need for positive regard from those significant others in the life-space emerges. In the perceptual field of the child, the family serves as the primary social unit. The parents, within this family structure, act as socializing agents in providing goals and values from which the child develops various patterns of behavior. Such behavioral patterns form the basis for interaction with others. In turn, these behavior patterns elicit reactions in the form of verbal and/or

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non-verbal responses from these significant others. These responses serve as indicators to the child of who he is and how others feel about him. The more positive responses provide input for a favorable concept of self and result in self actualization. The more negative the attitudes and feelings expressed through the responses of others, the more incongruent is the state of the individual and the less likely are his chances of attaining self actualization.

Studies by Dittes and Capra (1962), Zimbardo and Formica (1963), and Sampson (1965) have all found that ego functioning and development of the self-concept is a function of parental appraisal of the child's behavior. Studies by Zemlick and Watson (1953), Sewell, Mussen, and Harris (1955), and Rosenberg (1965) found that high self-esteem is related to parental acceptance. On the other hand, children with low self-esteem were found to have familial conditions which were characterized by a lack of respect and worth toward the child, and a scarcity of guidance extended to the child by the parents.

Ginott contends that the manner in which the parent responds verbally to the child's behavior and/or verbalizations will significantly effect the self esteem of the child. More specifically, the more verbally descriptive a parent is in responding to the child's behavior, the greater likelihood that the child will have high levels of self esteem. It is also suggested that the more verbally judgmental a parent is in responding to a child's behavior, the greater the likelihood that the child will have low levels of self esteem.

The rationale of this investigation was therefore based on the conceptualization that differential response patterns of parents have an effect on

the self esteem of the child. If this relationship is established, then efforts can be made to help parents and significant others in the child's life, become aware of their manner of response as it may be helpful or impair their relationship with the child.

Statement of Problem

The first concern is to determine if parents who use descriptive responses in responding to their child's behavior will have children with higher self-esteem than those who do not. The first hypothesis for testing is:

HYPOTHESIS I: Parents who are more descriptive and less judgmental in responding to the behavior and/or verbalizations of their child will have children with higher self esteem than parents who are more judgmental and less descriptive in responding to the behavior and/or verbalizations of their child.

The second question asked if the core conditions suggested by Rogers (1957) are a part of the personality component of the parent. If so, will the child then have greater self-esteem than if they are not a part of the personality component of the parent. This problem then is to determine if the presence of the specific core conditions of empathy, genuineness, and positive regard in the personality of the parent will reflect higher self-esteem in the child. Here the hypothesis to be tested, the second hypothesis of the investigation, is:

HYPOTHESIS 2: Parents who are empathic, genuine, and possessing positive regard will have children with higher self esteem than those parents who are lacking in empathy, genuineness and positive regard.

Procedures

The experimental procedures for this investigation involved the following stages in its implementation: (1) the development of the Parental Response Inventory, (2) a preliminary inquiry and pilot study utilizing the Parental Response Inventory, (3) preliminary contact and procedures related to the school systems involved and the sample selected (4) the administration of the Parental Response Inventory and the Relationship Inventory-B (Bierman, 1967) to the mothers of the children selected; and the administration of the Self-esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1960) to the children, and (5) the scoring, computer analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

The Parental Response Inventory is a structured Inventory consisting of twelve prepared situations and a choice of four alternatives for each situation. Six of the situations involve behavior of a positive nature and six of the situations involve behavior of a negative nature.

The Self Esteem Inventory is a fifty-eight item inventory with five subscales: general self, social self, home-parent, school-academic, and an estimate of social desireability. This instrument is based on the Rogers' and Dymond Scale (1954) and was modified for use with children by Coopersmith (1960).

The Relationship Inventory-B: Parent-toward-child form is a thirty item inventory gathered and adapted to form this experimental research questionnaire for use with parents to assess affective and empathic reactions in family interaction.

An analysis of the data utilized the multiple correlation, multiple regression, and multivariance analysis of variance models using the NYBMUL Multivariance computer program (Finn, 1968). In testing the hypothesis, the independent variable was the score obtained on the Parental Response Inventory and the dependent variable was the score obtained on the Self Esteem Inventory. A 2X2 sex by race analysis of variance was computed to test for the mean differences between the inner city and the suburban samples.

Data Sources

The setting for this study involved the selection of subjects from a random selection of schools in a large metropolitan school system and five suburban school districts in Northeastern United States, (U. S. 1970 Census: pop. 1,103, 813). The subjects consisted of two hundred and three eighth grade level children and their mothers. Represented were a wide range of educational, social and ethnic backgrounds. All participation was made on a voluntary basis.

Results

The data confirmed the relationship between maternal descriptiveness in negative situations and the self esteem of the child for inner city males and females only. Correlation coefficients were positive, substantial, and in the predicted direction.

Insert Table I here

The results suggest that the more descriptive the parent, the greater the self esteem of the child. Conversely, the more judgmental the parent the lower the self esteem of the child.

A 2X2 sex by race analysis of variance for both the black inner city sample and white suburban sample yielded significant univariate F ratios for the main effect of race on maternal descriptiveness in negative situations.

Insert Table II here

The main effect of race is confounded by the all black inner city sample and the all white suburban sample in that race also represents socio-cultural stratification level. Because of this complete confounding of race and stratification, the overall significant differences represents the differences between lower class inner city blacks and middle and upper middle class suburban whites.

In Hypothesis II, the overall test of relationship between the maternal relationship with the child and the child's self esteem is significant ($F=2.61$, with $df=12,394$, $p < .05$). Found to be significant are correlation coefficients between maternal empathy toward the child and the child's self esteem ($r=.16$, $p < .05$); the maternal genuineness toward the child and the child's self esteem ($r=.19$, $p < .05$); and the maternal positive regard toward the child and the child's self esteem ($r=.27$, $p < .05$).

Conclusions

In considering the results obtained, the question of cultural difference is raised. The finding from demographic data obtained on the sample that in better than fifty percent of the inner city homes the mother was considered to be the head of the household suggests that mother's role may have a significant effect on how she responds and subsequently on how this affects the level of self esteem of the child. Where mother is called upon to assume

the role of both disciplinarian and nurturant parent, the resulting effect of her response to the child may affect his self image negatively. The noted significant mean differences between the inner city black sample and the suburban white sample adds to the support of this contention. Mothers in the suburbs were found to have shared responsibility of child-rearing with the fathers and therefore this multiplicity of roles was not apparent. Likewise, for the suburban sample the significant effect of parental verbal response of the mother on the self esteem of the child was not realized.

The level of empathy, genuineness, and positive regard of the mother toward her child is found to be significantly related to the general self image and social self image of the child. The results obtained are in the predicted direction thereby indicating that where maternal empathy, genuineness, and positive regard are high, the child's self esteem is also higher than where maternal empathy, genuineness, and positive regard are found to be low. Mothers in this sample showed greater empathy, genuineness, and positive regard toward their daughters than toward their sons. Consistent with this finding is the fact that girls have slightly higher levels of overall self-esteem than do boys.

The study has measured and identified another aspect of socio-cultural significance related to child-rearing. Essentially, the degree of maternal descriptiveness in negative situations significantly affects the self esteem of the child for inner city children only. It clarifies some of the theoretical beliefs that parental descriptiveness affects the self esteem of the child regardless of the situation and regardless of socio-cultural conditions. It highlights the need for further investigation into these variables, refinement of the measures used, and greater control in studying these effects.

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Table I

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrices for Subscales of the Parental Response Inventory and Self Esteem Inventory for Inner City Sample.

Males and Females (N=35)

			Positive Situations	Negative Situations	Total
		M	11.97	9.31	21.29
	M	S.D.	3.02	3.07	4.76
General Self	15.31	4.56	.04	.50*	.35*
Social Self	5.31	2.07	.18	.62*	.52*
Home-Parent	4.23	2.64	.13	.52*	.41*
School-Academic	3.69	1.86	.04	.39*	.28*
Total	28.46	9.26	.10	.63*	.47*

*$p < .05$

Table II

Analysis of Variance for the Effects of Sex and Race on Maternal Descriptiveness and the Self Esteem of the Child for Inner City and Suburban Samples.

Source	Scale	SS	F(1,128)
Sex	Positive Situations	24.24	3.42
	Negative Situations	17.05	1.94
	General Self	16.14	.40
	Social Self	14.88	3.74
	Home-Parents	1.53	.29
	School-Academic	2.62	.66
Race Eliminating Sex	Positive Situations	3.15	.44
	Negative Situations	156.62	17.84*
	General Self	278.16	6.97*
	Social Self	8.34	2.10
	Home-Parents	46.51	8.84*
	School-Academic	8.99	2.26
Interaction	Positive Situations	1.99	.28
	Negative Situations	11.30	1.29
	General Self	17.87	.44
	Social Self	7.31	1.84
	Home-Parents	4.05	.77
	School-Academic	1.54	.39

*$p < .05$